

SUCCESS STORY

SCIP community HTC facilitates the re-integration of an HIV+ couple to treatment in Mecubúri, Nampula

24 year old Mariana lives with Tomás¹, her husband and their 2 children (1 and 3 years old) in Namina, Mecubúri district of Nampula Province. Mariana received her HIV+ result during the pre-natal consult of her second child. She returned home to show Tomás, her husband, the card she received during the pre-natal consult, complaining that no one explained to her exactly what it meant. Tomás took the card to the health facility to better understand what it said. At the time, health facility staff requested Tomás also be counselled and tested for HIV, given the positive result of his wife. Unfortunately, Tomás also tested positive for HIV.

After discussing between themselves, Tomás and Mariana began anti-retroviral treatment (ART). The medication was so strong, both Mariana and Tomás suffered from multiple side-effects: nausea, feeling ill, lack of appetite, diarrhea, body aches, vomiting, etc. The side effects were so horrible they decided to stop their treatment – if they were suffering from such side effects, surely they must have been given the incorrect medications. At this point, Mariana and Tomás didn't understand that medication could make one feel so poorly and still work correctly, instead of feeling healthy. According to the couple, they did not receive any explanation about HIV – what it is, how the virus works, the impact their positive result would have on their future, precautions, symptoms, etc. No one explained anything to them. Tomás and Mariana were tested and given a prescription for medication. At this time, they had no understanding of what being HIV+ meant – they were unaware and uninformed.

In October 2013, the SCIP community-based HIV tester/counselor (HTC-C) working in the area found the names of Mariana and Tomás on the list of those lost-to-follow-up for their treatment. The HTC-C visited Mariana at her shop and tried to understand why her and her husband had not returned to the health facility for treatment. Mariana explained what had happened and why they had stopped their treatment. The HTC-C requested a meeting with both Mariana and Tomás, during which he explained the entire process of testing positive for HIV. They were able to discuss together the implications of living with HIV and the benefits of treatment.

Happy with the explanation provided by the HTC-C, Mariana and Tomás returned to the HF and requested to be re-integrated into treatment. They took a new CD4 count, participated in a counselling session and began their treatment again. Their last child was born healthy and began nevirapine treatment, subsequently enrolling in the child-at-risk program of the HF, to which he attends regularly.

This couple is a model for others to follow. Both Tomás and Mariana are adhering to their treatment, attending their consults regularly at the HF and showing an elevated level of friendship and togetherness in face of the situation life has given them. They don't miss their appointments and follow the advice for a healthy lifestyle given to them by the HTC-C.



The HTC-C with the family of Mariana and Tomás. Foto: Sofia Bandomia

¹ Names changed to protect confidentiality.